THE NEWS LETTER

OF THE COLLEGE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

VII no. 1

VOL. VI, No. 1 | UNION COLLEGE : SCHENECTADY, N. Y. | JANUARY, 1945

The Challenge To Orthodox Scholarship

Great crises in society commonly lead to fundamental changes in educational philosophy. Witness the work of Plato after the Peloponnesian War, the strengthened impulse to monasticism after the fall of Rome, and the work of the humanists in the Renaissance, or of Locke after the English Civil War, or of President Eliot after the American Civil War. The present crisis is no exception. Already it is clear that in the next two decades we may expect a major reorientation in American education. In no field is the crisis more acute than in the humanities, and especially in literature.

For seventy years the dominant ideal of our literary scholarship in America has been linguistic and historical. Among college English teachers themselves—not to mention our colleagues in other fields—the conviction has grown that this kind of learning has become more or less irrelevant to the real needs of men. Hence the C.E.A. Hence also a variety of alternatives to the orthodox type of scholarship — creative writing by the scholar, courses in creative writing or journalism for the student, basic English or the aesthetic interpretation of literature. All of these conflicting alternatives have their uses. But none, I am bound to say, seems to me a worthy substitute for linguistics and literary history. For like the orthodox scholarship they fail to meet squarely the most compelling problem of our times—the problem of values.

We may justly complain when a young candidate for the Ph.D. spends an entire year studying Anglo-Saxon place names or the biography of some writer so obscure that even the examining committee cannot ask the candidate an intelligent question on his final year's work. But what of our alternatives? Of what use is creative writing unless we have wisdom as well as talent? Of what use is basic English, unless we have something besides scientific techniques to communicate to other nations? Of what use are even poetry and art, in our terrible era, unless they give us something besides an intense aesthetic pleasure? Sheer beauty is its own excuse for being, but he who finds only beauty or artistic expression in Sophocles, or Dante, or Shakespeare has missed a great deal that is central.

Our true function as humanists, in these times, is to rediscover the values that make us men.

The orthodox scholarship has too often neglected this task. Perhaps the basic error has been an undue subservience to the spirit of science. The scientist has as good a right to study the nervous systems of Australian grasshoppers as the causes of human cancer; as good a right to investigate Gothic paradigms or Germanic philology as to learn Greek. The science of philology, like biology, has shown that for an inquiring mind every subject is worthy of investigation. Indeed, the scientist can sometimes be faithful to his best work only when he ignores all human values except the disinterested love of knowledge.

The humanist has a more complex task. He, too, needs an open-minded, inquiring, objective approach to truth. But he is faithless to his central task unless he goes beyond science and intellect. When an unparalleled barbarism armed with every technique, though not with the true spirit of modern science, has assailed all that civilization has meant since the time of Plato, no one is a humanist who has not sought above all else to know the values that make us men.

Each of us must seek values in his own way—some in systematic philosophy, some in religious dogma or mysticism. Personally, I believe that one of the best ways is through orthodox scholarship which has so often been misused.

The curse of historical studies has been the demon of relativism. We can, if we like, discover in **Oedipus the King** only the Greek view of fate or the religion of the state and the family; in **Beowulf** or in Elizabethan tragedies of revenge the ethics of the feud; or in **The Merchant of Venice** the barbarous medieval intolerance of Jews. This is to find values very different from our own, but inferior. Again, we may discover our own troubled skepticism in John Donne, our passion and our love of sensuous imagery in Dante, our aggressive self-assertion in Milton's Satan, or our romantic sympathy for the under dog in **The Merchant of Venice.** Either way we miss the true riches of the past. To note only what is different from our own values is to journey to the Indies and bring back a wooden hand loom or ox yoke. To remain immersed in our own incomplete values while exploring the past, is to journey to the same Indies and bring back only our own wares.

Surely the excuse for any journey into the past is to find something precious which we do not have. It is to find in Dante not merely his pictorial power or the passion and pathos of Francesca's story, but also his vision of a love which moves the sun and the stars while meting out a pure, impartial, and stern justice to moral failure. It it to find in Milton's Satan not a romantic idealization of self-assertion, but a realistic picture of the destructiveness of egoism as the center and source of all evil. In short, it is to find in the supreme minds of the past not chiefly our own preconceptions or the prejudices which we have outgrown, but ideas which challenge and correct our own, and truths which we need to rediscover.

Consider, for example, **The Merchant of Venice.** Professor Charlton, with his modern sense for

(Continued on Page 4)

Indefensible Outposts

I should be interested in the views of other teachers about the use of "cannot help but" and other demons by which teachers of freshman composition are perennially besieged. My own answer to the person who raised the question in the most recent issue of the **News Letter** is that we must accept this expression as correct. I say the same of "due to" used adverbially for "because of"; "the reason is because" for "the reason is that"; and "will" for "shall" in the first person simple future tense. Also, it is impossible to insist on a singular verb with "none"; and split infinitives and prepositions at the end of sentences have, I hope, long since been accorded respectability, when used with discrimination. And we might as well admit that we have been defeated by "kind of a" and "sort of a."

"Real" as an adverb is not too bothersome in my own classes, and I think there is hope of proscribing it for a while longer, at least. But I am wavering on "different than," although I still correct it. It is probably much more common in colloquial English than "different from," and we must admit that it is sometimes more convenient.

Usage is after all the only determinant of correctness. If Associated Press writers, highly paid radio commentators, professional lecturers, and candidates for the Presidency of the United States all use "due to" and "the reason is because," we merely make ourselves absurd by calling these constructions wrong, however illogical they may be, and however unpleasant they may sound to us (when somebody else says them).

The military strategists tell us that Hitler has greatly aided the United Nations cause by clinging at all cost, until the last possible moment, to remote and indefensible regions. We English teachers might well take to heart the impending fate of the **Fuehrer**, and retire in good order to positions that we can reasonably hope to defend. Let us keep our eyes on the ultimate issue—the communication of experience with economy, clarity, and force, and not dissipate our energy in trying to impose irrelevant and antique shibboleths.

Ellsworth Barnard,
Alfred University.

Help! Where Am I?

We all know about the six great periods of European literature. We have probably noted that the first five periods were successively shorter — about 1200 classical years, perhaps 900 years of medievalism, 200 Renaissance years from Italy to England, 100 or more years of neo-classicism, and 50 or more Romantic years. That corresponds with the increasing tempo of what we call civilization.

We know also that the Romantic Period ended about a hundred years ago with Heine's **Romantic School,** the death of Scott, Gogol's **Cloak,** and the American Civil War. Then came the Realistic Period.

Now what puzzles me is where I am in 1944. There seem to be four possibilities:

(1) That a Realistic Period, fitting the diminishing pattern, ran for less than 50 years and ended, without any scholar's noticing it, about 1870 in Europe and 1890 in America. That would leave me in some later unnamed period—perhaps number 8 or 9. Will some literary historican please christen it and outline the trends?

(2) That some element slowed up the time mechanism so that the Realistic Period is (or was) longer than the Romantic. This retarding element might be the great nineteenth century increase in books, especially old books, which would supply an area of escape from current trends without being strong enough or sufficiently unified to dominate the literary fashions. If this is correct, when did Realism end or am I still in it?

(3) That some element has frozen the Realistic Period so that it will be the dominant type forever, with the variety of minor currents of Romanticism running along with it. This freezing element might be merely the greater psychological impact of realism on the reader, since we know that the force of recognition and identification is stronger than the appeal of the new and strange. Howells seemed to think that Realism would last forever; was he right?

(4) That there really has been no Realistic Period but that we are still in the Romantic Period. If so, the minor currents of Romanticism in theory 3 would be called the main stream, with a winding course through naturalism, symbolism, decadence, historical romance, Joyce and Stein, surrealism, the hard-boiled guys, and the disciples of Donne. Some of the humanists believe this.

Well, at present I am teaching co-eds who tremble with fear at my frown, but some day the war veterans will be back with their skepticism and impertinent questions. They'll ask me, "Say, Pop, where are we now?" And what is my answer?

W. L. Werner,
Penna. State College.

THE NEWS LETTER

Editor
BURGES JOHNSON

Application pending for entry as second-class matter, at the postoffice at Schenectady, N. Y.

Subscription Price.....$1.00

Published Nine Times a Year at
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for the
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Editorial

We are invited to join "The League for Sanity in Poetry", with headquarters at 358 West Saxet Drive, Corpus Christi, Texas. The Committee which sends out a leaflet appeal for extended membership and sympathetic support quotes liberally from the works of several liberated poets and makes a good case in demonstrating "how insane our poetry has become." The petitioners assert querelously that "our most reputable magazines, our most eminent book publishers, while sane enough in their prose departments, have been turning forth a form of verse that is at best freakish or eccentric, and at worst appears to be a product of dementia praecox. And what is worse still, this verse has been applauded by those supposed to be in a position to know, has been awarded important prizes, and has increasingly crowded out the sane poets".

There is not space here to reprint again the many interesting examples cited by our protestors, but one may serve. It consists of a few lines from a poem by Dylan Thomas, selected by Louis Untermeyer as one of the four English poets to be added to his recent anthology, and hailed by his publishers as "unquestionably the most exciting of the younger English poets:"

"Once below a time,
When my pinned-around-the-spirit
Cut-to-measure flesh bit,
Suit for a serial sum
On the first of each hardship,
My paid-for slaved-for owned too late
In love torn breeches and blistered jacket
On the snapping rims of the ashpit. . . ."

Other excerpts are even more so, if you know what we mean. Yet we find ourselves not wholly in sympathy with the plaintive and well-sustained appeal which lies before us.

First: There is no law of morals or literature which requires a poet to be sane or to write sanely; second: there is no law requiring anyone to read beyond the first line or two of any poem which does not arouse emotional response in his breast. These two considerations are enough to throw the complaint out of court.

But more important still is the fact that the artist's product is made up of two ingredients,—the emotional experience he wishes to communicate, and the set of symbols or the technique by which he conveys it. The glimpse of beauty or of truth which has been vouchsafed him is the measure of his worth; but if we do not understand the symbols by which he attempts to communicate his experience, we cannot measure him; any more than we could if he spoke to us in French and we understood only German. But there is no reason why we should attempt to suppress him on that account. Perhaps someone in his audience may learn French. If he is content to keep on talking under the circumstance, why God bless him.

As for his techniques, — the artist is for ever tiring of the old technique and so it does not satisfy him as a medium for expression. He tries to find newer and less threadbare devices. While he is searching, let us be patient with him, even though he seems to be temporarily insane. If he is, he will get over it and find a great satisfaction in the rediscovery of the old techniques. If it be ourselves who are crazy, and he the only sane one, we still must let him alone. Verbum sap.

Gleaned From the Mail

This Palladium of Pedagogical Progress is now so far behind its announced date that we are tempted to call this the February issue and start afresh. Many obstacles causing successive delays have piled up to bring this situation about, and the fact that your editor is in LaLuz, New Mexico, until the end of February and will then lecture himself home again through the middle west makes a return to normalcy difficult. But it seems best to keep our sequence of dates and volume numbers intact, even though tardy, and no further apologies will appear in this column. Members are urged not to bear with us, but prove their sympathy by contributing their ideas and opinions on all appropriate topics, and mailing them at one to Burges Johnson, La Luz, New Mexico (which is the spot where Hervey Allen burned up all the characters in "Anthony Adverse" when he wearied of them. Please attach no significance to this fact.

Dear Editor:

There was in Lieut. Knickerbocker's article, "The Higher Function," (**News Letter** for Nov.) a point which deserves special deliberation. Many will doubtless disagree with Lieut. Knickerbocker, but there are obstrusive facts which make his position tenable. I refer to the remark that "the teaching of composition and the teaching of literature are two entirely different processes, so different that there is ample justification for bisecting a department of English on that basis." English has, indeed, become a hydra-headed affair. The same person might easily be asked to teach Old English, Remedial Composition, the History of Literary Criticism, and Robert Browning, besides directing plays, coaching a debate squad, sponsoring a creative writing club, and censoring the student paper. Of course it is possible for one to do all these things because one has been doing them. Nevertheless the fact remains that an English teacher is expected to be philologist, a grammarian, a stylist, an elecutionist, a debater, a logician, a critic, a historian, a philosopher, an expert in biography, a creative artist, a dramatic producer, and a journalist.

I am aware that it might be indecorous to suggest in a day and age already blighted with overspecialization that more might be wholesome, but factors of economy of effort and efficiency of teaching are worth considering as being able to counteract pursuant evils.

Especially am I concerned about the problem of the English teacher in the secondary schools. He (or she) is obliged to teach any or all of these things with a preparation in any one of them which must inevitably be inadequate. Would the situation be better if a teacher could be trained and hired to teach literature, and another trained and hired to teach composition, another to teach speech, etc? There are practical difficulties I know, but would there not be students coming into college with better preparation?

Douglas S. Mead,
Penna. State College.

Owls Again

In your editorial concerning "biological argument" about owls, you drove me to my Unabridged Webster with your erudite word, "strigiformean". Why, darn you, there is no such word in the dictionary. You have evidently coined a new word. Many thanks. I would like to add something about owls. Do you recall Shakespeare's song from "Love Labor's Lost" beginning "When icicles hang by the wall", etc.? Well, Shakespeare refers to the "staring owl" that has "a merry note". Did you ever hear of an owl with a "merry note"? To me an owl's note is the most lugubrious thing that ever came out of an ornithological throat. Perhaps in "Merry England", in Shakespeare's day, the owls were cheerful, but American owls in these depressing times are very far from merry.

L. G. Painter
Miss. State College for Women.

A careful study of all material under "Owl" in Noah Webster's latest unabridged handbook will reveal all we know on the subject. —Ed.

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NOTICE

Abandonment of the annual meeting, even though regional in character, at government request, has delayed the Report of the CEA Nominating Committee. It will appear in the February News Letter, together with a ballot for mailing.

★ ★

Far we have gotten by intricate means—
By quantum mechanics, radar, electricity;
By assembly lines and adding machines,—
So far, that we cannot return to simplicity.

Research On Olympus

Dear Editor:

You may be interested to know that Christopher Morley fell on me like a ton of bricks at the Book-of-the-Month meeting on Monday, telling me that I had misquoted Sidney in my article for the "News Letter". He said that the poem ends not as I have quoted it — "Biting my tongue and pen," but "Biting my truant pen." I looked it up when I came back and find it just as you and I put it in the "News Letter" in three anthologies, one of them printed in London by Gollancz, so I guess Chris is wrong.

Dorothy Canfield Fisher

Dear Chris:

Yes, you and Mrs. Fisher are **both** right about the line from Sidney. There certainly are two versions of the penultimate line of this first sonnet in Astrophel and Stella. Mrs. Fisher can claim priority for her version; your wording stands on the authority of "editorial judgment".

The case is this. The first quarto edition of **Astrophel and Stella,** printed in 1591 by Thomas Newman (doubtless a job of pirating, which made the Sidney family sore), reads as follows:

"Byting my tongue and penne, beating my selfe for spite: Foole saide My muse to mee, looke in thy heart and write." (And so Mrs. Fisher scores here.)

But Newman had the temerity to bring out a second quarto the same year, and here the line begins:

"Byting my trewand penne, . ."

(So your version comes in, in a photo finish.)

The first, and unauthorized, edition of **Arcadia** (1593) contains the sonnet, again in Mrs. Fisher's version. But when Mary Sidney, the Countess of Pembroke, brought out the authorized family version of the **Arcadia** in 1598, the sonnet was printed with **your** reading.

You pays your money, and you takes your choice. From now on, I'm happy to say, they'll always be known to me as the Fisher version, and the Morley version. (I might say that neither one would pass muster in Freshman English!)

The account tapers off as follows: Later versions contain such pleasant variations as "I my truant pen," and "my trew and pen." Practically all modern editors have accepted the "Morley version." Sir Edmund K. Chambers, **the** Elizabethan scholar, prints "my truant pen" in The Oxford Book of Sixteenth Century Verse. But you can still find the "Fisher version" in M. Feuillerat's definitive edition of Sidney (Cambridge U., 1922.)

The upshot of all this "schollarding" is, as any one who has ever read Elizabethan texts or MSS., knows, that you can find as many versions of an Elizabethan poem (whether the author be Sidney, Shakespeare, or Dyer) as there are MSS. and printings. The Elizabethans saw no reason to be bound by consistency, or repetition, in spelling, punctuation, or wording. Their minds were never still. Every time they copied a line, or even tried to reprint it, they thought of some new happy way to do it, and couldn't resist the temptation to try out the experiment. The business of collating Elizabethan texts has by now become a big industry. The tycoon of this industry is Prof. Hyder Rollins, at Harvard.

What really pleases me, though, Chris, is that you and Mrs. Fisher should be thinking of Sidney. Truly, he's been in my mind incessantly this fall, as I read the papers about the British expedition in the Netherlands. 359 years ago this month, Sidney went to the Netherlands, in the vanguard of the expedition by the British to help the Dutch free themselves from Spanish domination. It was the last, and tragic, gesture of his life. And today the British are fighting over exactly the same ground that Sidney fought over. Practically every place name of Sidney's campaigns has been in the daily papers since September, and will be in those papers you read the day you get this.

Sidney was the first of the British to go over. He was appointed Governor of Flushing (on Walcheren Island) in the autumn of 1585. His biographer (Wallace) tells how Sidney came to Flushing: "After a rough passage Sir Philip reached Walcheren on Thursday, November 18th (1585), but owing to the stress of weather he was compelled to land at the Rammekins and proceed to Flushing on foot." Later, all the big Elizabethan names came over to Holland: the Earl of Leicester, the Earl of Essex, Lord Willoughby, General Norris, etc. The English campaigned around **Nimuengen** tried to relieve **Venlo** (see tomorrow's papers), and had their headquarters at Arnheim. It was in a raid on Zutphen (just north of Arnheim) that Sidney (as a result of his quixotic gesture) got his fatal wound. He was brought back to **Arnheim,** where he died 18 October 1586, at the age of 32.

I haven't seen any reference to this sixteenth-century British campaign in the Lowlands in this year's papers, either British or American. A strange omission. But I can tell you, it's much in my mind.

Honest, Chris, you have more of the milk of human kindness than even I suspected. I feared vials of wrath, for my inexcusable failure to answer your grand letters. You have some real correspondence due from me. Please take this as a preamble.

Affectionately,
Ralph Sargent.

The All-Over View

World War II has brought to the fore a new reading public, the common people, determined upon freedom, decency, and progress, proclaims Ralph Peterson (**Tomorrow,** Nov.). They are humanity itself, Archibald MacLeish reminds us; accordingly the humanist must have faith in them, confidence in their ultimate dignity (**Atlantic,** Nov., and **Nation,** Oct. 28). Already poets and artists are responding to their spiritual needs, notes Dorothy Thompson (**SRL,** Dec. 2), and she cites Russell Davenport's "My Country," recently publicized by **Life** (Nov.). The sacrifice and toil of China's common folk instigate Pearl Buck's radio play "Will This Earth Hold?" (**Asia,** Nov.); that of our own veterans is disturbingly shown in the short story (**Harper's,** Dec.) "It's Good to Be Home."

"The veteran," warns Bernard Iddings Bell, "needs a church which will tell him the truth about his own incompetence and the incompetence of the generation which bred and trained him" (**Atlantic,** Dec.). Yet the revival of religion now under way, Dwight J. Bradley ominously points out (**Tomorrow,** Dec.), may either implement the forces of reaction, turn into inefficient sentimentalism, or furnish the dynamic drive towards new and advanced social ideals—according to which group utilizes its terrific force.

Russia utilizes it well, maintains Anna Louise Strong, and Jean-Paul Sartre exults that France, through her silence under torture, has found her soul (**Atlantic,** Dec.) Fanatical Japanese prisioners impress Lin Yutang with its less admirable aspect (**Asia,** Nov.); "The Unhappiest Women in the World" has found her soul (**Atlantic,** Dec.). Fanatical Japanese prisoners imp lanning for another war (**R. D.,** Dec.). Lest we forget, eye-witness accounts of what they have done to Greece (**Life,** Nov. 27) and to France (**R. D.,** Dec.) should be supplemented by a summary of their deliberate (**Free World,** Nov.) starving, torturing, and demoralizing of the children of the world. James B. Conant grimly concludes that unless we organize effectively to keep the peace, America must remain armed to the

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teeth (**Vital Sp.**, Nov. 15).

Largely because America does not care for planning, thinks Gunnar Myrdal (**Atlantic**, Nov.), within three years after war ends she will experience a gigantic slump. To circumvent disaster, various plans are afoot. **Fortune** (Nov.) suggests an immense building program; the New Republic devotes a special supplement (Nov. 27) to "Prosperity—How to Get It; How to Keep It"; I. F. Stone gives the facts leading to Senator Pepper's Resolution, "The 65-Cent Minimum" (**Nation**, Nov. 25); and reform is on the way in medical economics (Dec. **Survey Graphic** and **Fortune**). Stuart Chase, warning that Big Business, Big Unions, and Big Agriculture may take up where the Axis leaves off (**Vital Sp.**, Dec. 9), details the management needed to ensure both public service and individual profits (**Surv. Graph.**, Dec.).

In "The Convergence of American and Russian Systems," William G. Carleton (**Vit. Sp.**, Dec. 1) arouses to America's dire need for a strong international authority; action already taken is listed in "Dumbarton Oaks Proposal." For effective participation, America may have to change her own procedures (**Free World**, Dec.); "America's Opportunity to Create and Maintain Lasting Peace" is shown by several of her prominent thinkers in the **Nation** for Oct. 21. The world is now one organized whole; if it were healthy, it could have no war, states John Haynes Holmes (Oct. **Surv. Graph.**). Of the four requisites for dealing with the present social revolution, suggests Edward G. Olsen (**Vital Sp.**, Dec. 1), one is dynamic, reoriented teaching. But have we, he asks, the imagination essential for teaching the first **air-borne** generation? Jacques Barzum reminds us that, whether the method be lecturing, discussion, or tutoring, the effective agent is the living teacher. Instead of acting as a fetter in a time of drastic change, why—inquires A. D. Winspear (**Tomorrow**, Nov.)—has not liberal education unified itself in a synthesis of social movements and historic forces consciously aiming at a technique of social control?

Mind, obviously, is being studied from two different angles. Intones the East: Man's real nature is divine; his aim is to realize both his divinity and the universality of truth. (**Vedanta and the West**, Nov.-Dec.). Gleefully cries the West: Television techniques may aid in understanding the mechanism of mental activity; our only bar to plotting brain messages is lack of suitable instruments. (**SNL**, Oct. 21.)

A. V. Hall

Premedical Education

Union College will hold a conference on education for premedical students in April. Discussion of the place of the liberal arts will take up one session. The editor will be glad to transmit views and opinions to the chairman of the meeting.

BUY WAR BONDS!

INDEFENSIBLE OUTPOSTS

(Continued from Page 1)

tolerance and his modern feeling that a man is made bad by bad treatment and bad economic conditions, regards Shylock as a sympathetic character—even a hero. Professor Stoll, with his eyes for the harsh realities of history, regards Shylock as a comic butt and villain, the object of scorn and derision to an audience to whom the brutal medieval prejudice against Jews was a matter of course. From his view it is only a step to Mr. Tannenbaum's reluctant conclusion that "in his prejudices Shakespeare was the typical arrogant, bumptious, unthinking Englishman of his day." But surely the significant thing about the play is neither the modern values of Mr. Charlton, which Shakespeare never heard of, nor the prejudices of his own age, which we have outgrown. It is the ideals of his age. We can find them, I suspect, in the central tradition of the English Renaissance—the Christian humanism of More and Erasmus.

Their ideal of a life of natural pleasure, r e a s o n, temperance, beauty, and charity — of which Portia is an embodiment — is the exact antithesis of Shylock. Seen from this point of view, he is warped by greed and poisoned by envy. He is bad not because of his Jewish blood — witness his own charming daughter. He is bad because he lives by a narrow, legalistic, uncharitable set of values. It is a grave blot on an otherwise beautiful play that Shakespeare has identified these false values with the Jewish religion. But there is a genuine insight in the view that Shylock, like the Nazis, is a fellow human being, corrupted by fanatical loyalty to false ideology.

So at least, it appears to me. In any case, the general principle is clear. We need a more critical attitude toward the prevailing relativism of our times. Some values are really true, some really false. In our graduate schools to the superstitions of our ancestors and more to their central philosophy—more therefore to the enduring values of Western civilization which stem from Greece and Palestine. Among our scholarly labors we need more of such admirable studies as Willard Farnham's **The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy** and Theodore Spencer's **Shakespeare and the Nature of Man**—works which unite a scientific awareness of the manysidedness of truth with an insight into what is humanly significant. For those who seek answers to the deeper problems of our age, and who fail to find them in science, in dogma, in mysticism, or in the elaborate system of philosophy, the historical study of the great poets can combine the exact method and tentative conclusions of science with the power of imaginative vision and the authority of racial experience. Rightly used, orthodox scholarship has a great work to do.

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